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ABSTRACT

This document outlines, in detail, the Vocational Readiness Package for young girls, which is a week-long program utilizing simulation games and role-playing, while employing peer group counseling techniques to dramatize the realities concerning women in marriage and careers today. After three years of using this program, the authors have compiled some findings on girls' attitudes toward marriage and careers. These are that the average girl: (1) plans on being married and does not expect to work for a living; (2) has minimal knowledge about careers and their requirements; (3) selects traditional careers for women; and (4) is distrustful of, and often hostile to, the concept of "Women's Liberation." The chief differences in thinking among average girls seems to arise more from socioeconomics and educational experience rather than ethnic or cultural background. (Author/PC)

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TITLE: YWCA VOCATIONAL READINESS PACKAGE

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WHY A VOCATIONAL READINESS PROGRAM IS NECESSARY

Background and Purpose of the Game

"When you ask a little boy what he is going to be when he grows up he tells you. He may not end up being what he says, and he may 'be' a number of different things over the course of his life, but throughout he is focusing on work. Most little girls say they will be married, period. Data of the U.S. Department of Labor and results of research of the California Advisory Commission on the Status of Women show the following: The average life expectancy of women today is 75 years; nine out of ten girls will marry; eight out of ten will have children; nine out of ten will be employed outside the home for some period during their lives; at least six out of ten will work full time outside their homes for up to 30 years; at least one in ten will be widowed before she is 50; at least one in eight will be the head of her family; probably three in ten will be divorced; approximately three out of ten girls go to college; most girls do not see themselves as achievers; most girls have not been trained or influenced to deal with the realities they will face in their lives; society will continue to experience the loss of the talents of many bright women because girls continue to believe they must choose between a family and a career."[1]

The Vocational Readiness Package was developed jointly by the YWCA of Los Angeles with the Department of Labor, Women's Bureau, and the California Advisory Commission on the Status of Women. After experimentation and consultation with high school girls in which they evaluated traditional and innovative vocational materials, it was obvious that the

[1]Caroline Heine, Executive Director of California Advisory Commission on The Status of Women

successful approach was to reach the girls emotionally rather than intellectually. They were much more open to real people and their experiences than they were to cold statistics.

Specifically, the VOCATIONAL READINESS PACKAGE is a week's program utilizing simulation games and role-playing, while employing peer group counseling techniques to dramatize the realities concerning women in marriage and careers today.

The Package has been successfully demonstrated in over 40 schools and other institutions with approximately 3,000 girls in the Los Angeles area by a three-member YWCA staff team. This experience has shown that the most suitable groups are Home Economics or Business classes which are predominantely made up of girls. Experimentation also indicated that planning for other people, rather than self, was less threatening and consequently more successful. More often than not girls choose to work with profiles of characters similar to themselves and inject their own ideas and personalities. Some findings in the three-year period concerning girls' attitudes toward marriage and careers are:

1. The average teenage girl - despite socio-economic, educational, ethnic and cultural differences - plans on being married and does not expect to work for a living.

2. She has minimal knowledge about careers and their requirements; ignores statistics which indicate more than 50% of female population are poor because they lack employable skills; and believes - despite evidence of this even in her own family - that her future will be bright and prosperous.

3. She selects traditional careers for women, e.g., nurse, secretary, airline stewardess, teacher.

4. She is distrustful of and often hostile to the concept of "women's liberation."

5. The chief differences among average girls in their thinking seem to arise more from socio-economic and educational experience rather than ethnic or cultural background.

YWCA VOCATIONAL READINESS PACKAGE

If there is any subject about which most adults in the United States have an opinion -- usually negative, as well as uninformed -- it is Welfare. Relatively few, however, are aware or deeply concerned about the root causes of increasing welfare rolls, preferring to assume an "Archie Bunker" stereotyped concept of a promiscuous, parasitic, ethnic minority sucking life-blood from the taxpayer's billfold. It has probably never occurred to the average woman that she and her children could ever be on the receiving end of that degrading system euphemistically titled "Social Service." Yet, the largest percentage of recipients today are known as the AFDC caseload (Aid to Families with Dependent Children), and, contrary to popular belief, are almost 50% white and increasingly fatherless as the result of divorce, abandonment, and widowhood. In addition, a growing number are "first generation poverty" -- middle class women who find themselves left with several small children, no income, no employable skills -- in an economy that pays starvation wages to women who "do not qualify through education or experience" for the less than optimum salaries of their more fortunate, credentialed sisters. As for meaningful training programs that could lead to rewarding employment, they are almost nonexistent for disadvantaged women, despite all the political propaganda that would have the public believe otherwise.

Aside from the Womens' Liberationists and concerned groups such as the Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, and the state Advisory Commission on the Status of Women, who have researched the problem, it appears that the majority of otherwise issue-conscious women are ignorant and apathetic about what is

happening to those who are born and educated "female" in our work-oriented society. If there is to be significant welfare reform as well as an upgrading of women's career aspirations in general, programs must be initiated of a preventive and rehabilitative nature to prepare girls and women for fulfilling and financially secure careers whether they are married or single.

A team of YWCA staff in Los Angeles has been experimenting with such a program for the past three years under a grant from the Rosenberg Foundation and in cooperation with other women's organizations -- particularly the Women's Bureau, Department of Labor, Western Region, and the California Advisory Commission on the Status of Women. In an attempt to provide services other than traditional clubs for high school girls and to assist schools by offering supplementary program, the YWCA team developed a "Vocational Readiness Package" available at no cost to schools in Los Angeles.

The underlying premise for the "package" is that ordinary vocational information and statistics leave girls cold because they cannot see these facts as applicable to themselves. Despite all the publicity given to changing life styles, our work with average teenage girls of all ethnic and economic backgrounds reveals that the majority still visualize themselves marrying Prince Charming and settling down in a financially secure rose-covered CASTLE. Statistics which indicate that nine out of ten women will work for paid employment, that six out of ten will work at least thirty years from necessity, that 60% of the female labor force today earns less than $3,000 a hear have no meaning for Miss Teenage America. SOMEBODY ELSE will inherit those problems.

The object of the YWCA Vocational Readiness Package is to give flesh and blood to the statistics by making them real people, and, through a process of

simulation games and improvisational drama, to reach the girls through their emotions. Using peer group counseling techniques, the team leader acts as a facilitator and information resource while students discuss and attempt to solve the dilemmas of women who had not planned on being a grim statistic. In its complete form the package is a week's program although it can be lengthened or shortened to fit the needs of a particular school.

On the first day the girls pair up in groups of ten to play the game, Will Marriage Turn You on for the Next 50 Years? Originally devised by Carolyn Heine, Executive Director of the California Advisory Commission on the Status of Women, and revised for classroom use by the YW team, the game provides each pair of students with a profile of an imaginary girl. She will live to be 75, and in eight out of ten instances will marry and have children; she will have a specified amount of education or vocational training (three out of ten attend college), and will work outside the home for a certain length of time. In the game each pair of students is asked to fantasize for their particular girl as she might have done -- what career will she choose, whom will she marry, and how many children will she have? After all participants have described the dreams of their girl to the group, they are asked in turn to choose an envelope containing the chance events in her life that she could not have anticipated. These chance factors, based on statistics, deal with realities such as divorce, widowhood, inadequate family income, etc. A sample card may read, "When she is 32 and her children are nine, seven, and five, her husband is killed in a tragic accident. His insurance barely covers the cost of the funeral. Based on the plans you made for her, how can she cope? What could she have done earlier to avert this situation or make it less severe?" Members of the group then attempt

to counsel the pair about the best course of action for their girl. Before the 50-minute class period has ended, everyone in the group is communicating -- revealing their lack of knowledge about requirements for many careers; their personal attitudes concerning marriage, family, employment; and quite often, very touching and sometimes sad realities concerning their own families' problems .

On the following four days the same partners in their groups play another game created by the YWCA staff -- Wheel of Fortune: A Game of Chance Concerning Marriage and Careers. The game is introduced by one team member who tells the entire class about six girls who, ten or twelve years ago, were in school as they now are. These six never realized that they would be a part of that statistic: Six out of ten women work for at least thirty years from necessity. Each girls is then described as she was when a sophomore: Linda, the shy, fairly good student who becomes pregnant in her junior year: Genille, the popular, active club joiner, caught in the cross-fire of warring divorced parents who oppose her dating; Connie, the orphaned mechanically-inclined misfit, moving from one foster home to another; Maria, the plain, gawky younger sister, always in the shadow of her "perfect" sibling; Phyllis, the artistic dreamer, seeking escape from her deserted mother's bitterness by designing wedding gowns during class -- one whe will wear when she marries her steady; and Marcie, the independent thinker whose parents agree that people and the environment are more important than honors or grades.

Each pair of students decides which of the six girls' lives they wish to plan for twelve years. They will determine her vocational interests through using a checklist and select several careers she might consider on the basis of her abilities, interests, personality, etc. On the following day they will

look up information about the careers, choose her particular vocational goal, and plan her education accordingly. They then simulate her attempt to get her first full time job by filling out a job application and then spinning the Wheel of Fortune which indicates whether she is hired or not on the basis of factors other than educational requirements, e.g., "You are hired if you are over 21;" ".... if you have had experience;" ".... if this job is usually filled by women," etc. The partners are permitted three spins and if their girl does not get the job of her choice, they must place her in some unskilled position at $1.65 per hour. The next step is to figure out her budget on the beginning salary. (Most teenagers think a salary of $275 a month is fantastic until they deal with realities such as housing, food, transportation, and TAXES!) It is often at this stage that many realize for the first time that a number of traditional "female" jobs are not so glamorous after all. Some even go back to the vocational information sources and re-plan their character's education and career choice.

On the fourth day of the program comes the BIG QUESTION. Will she get married? Again the Wheel of Fortune comes into play to demonstrate that there are factors other than desire which enter into this option: "Yes, if you are between ages 18 and 22;" "Yes, if you are in a career that employs many men." If in three spins their girl does not "luck out," they must assume she does not marry during the span of time they are planning -- a major disaster to most who cannot conceive of a marriageless existence (although one out of ten women never marries). Many would prefer that she have an unhappy marriage ending in divorce with its myriad problems than she not marry at all! If their character does marry, they spin the wheel to ascertain her husband's education and, on that basis, determine a career for him. They then decide upon the number of children

for the couple. Finally, to simulate that they have brought her to the age of 28, and to demonstrate that getting married is not "The End," they must spin the wheel two more times to find out if any unexpected events occur in marriage or career -- an unplanned pregnancy, divorce, widowhood, promotion and raise, job lay-off, career made obsolete by automation, etc.

Considering these events as well as the other aspects of their character's life, the partners decide whether and why they think she is happy or not and what questions they would like to ask her. On the final day they vicariously experience meeting the characters and having their questions answered: "Did Linda keep the baby and marry the father?" "Did Connie ever find happiness?" "Did Phyllis design her own wedding gown and did she marry Bruce?" Six girls are asked to volunteer to play the roles of the characters in the improvisational drama, "I am a Human Being: Do Not Fold, Mutilate, or Staple." One team member prepares the actresses while the others discuss with their groups the different plans each pair has made. The groups then devise a list of questions to ask the actresses and set the stage for the drama -- a TV Talk Show moderated by the team member working with the six volunteers.

As the drama unfolds, counselors, teachers, and the YW team members themselves are continually amazed at the degree of participation on the part of both actresses and audience. Each character is real to them and what happened to her is important to them! Whether the program is being conducted in schools of high, medium, or low socio-economic population; whether the group is composed of a cross-section of average teenagers or a select number of "problem adolescents," the outcome, with a rare exception, is the same -- total involvement and varying

degrees of attitude change.

When asked on an anonymous form what they learned from the program, girls comment, "I learned to speak out in a group. I have never been able to do so. I learned not to be afraid to speak out."

"I learned about the kinds of jobs you can get when going or not going to college."

"Get all the education that you can and don't rush off into marriage unprepared." (Girl in problem group selected by vice principal as "bathroom girls" - continually skipping class.)

"I learned it is possible to keep my baby and make it on my own." (Girl in school for teenage mothers.)

A teacher recently informed the team of her surprise that although the program occurred in early December, her students were still talking about the characters in the drama on returning to the classroom after the holidays.

Although the Vocational Readiness Package does not work miracles -- producing a classroom full of girls realistically planning for their future -- it sets the wheels in motion, not by giving sterectyped answers, but by stimulating questions that will provoke thinking, discussion, and, hopefully, some planning. Presently, limited budget and staff prevent the YWCA of Los Angeles from providing the program to the extent needed. It is hoped that the success of the package as a demonstration of a community agency working with the schools, filling unmet needs for all students rather than for a select membership, will attract additional financial support to make the program available on a wider scale.

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